

## Enhancing Effective Administration at Faculty Level through Shared Leadership

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### Abstract

We live in the world of knowledge, and knowledge keeps increasing in shape and complexity. As a result, no single individual has the repository of knowledge required to effectively manage an organisation all alone to affect organisational performance positively. This explains why administration is explained as doing things through the efforts of others. This assertion supports the idea of shared leadership so that the skills and competencies required to lead organisations today are found in more than one individual in the organisation. This paper seeks to examine the concept of shared leadership, characteristics of shared leadership, and types of partnership at the faculty level, benefits and limitations of shared leadership. The paper concludes on recommendations for enhancing shared leadership at the faculty administration level.

**Keywords:** Leadership, shared leadership, faculty administration and partnership

### Introduction

Leadership is a pivotal issue that affects the success or failure of every organization, institution, country and religious movement. The speed of change and complexity in today's business environment make leadership increasingly exigent, placing unrealistic expectations on heroic leaders (Yukl, 2006). Obviously, it is becoming increasingly difficult for any single individual to possess all of the skills and abilities required to competently lead organizations today (O'Toole, Galbraith & Lawler, 2002). Frequently, organizations learn in the hard way that no one individual can save an institution from mediocre performance and no individual no matter how gifted a leader can be 'right' all the time (O'Toole et al 2002:67). Simply put, in a large organization, it is just too much work for one person to do and no one individual is likely to do it all. Since leadership is, by definition, doing things through the efforts of others, it is obvious that there is little that a business leader acting alone can do to affect institutional performance. There is no exception to faculty administration.

Pearce (2007), on his part pointed out 'as organizations have steadily progressed into the knowledge economy, we can no longer rely on simple notions of top-down, command -and- control based on the idea that workers are merely interchangeable drones' (Pearce 2007:355). There are several ways of enhancing effective administration at the faculty level. Among them are delegation of authority, devolution of authority, decentralisation, teamwork and shared leadership. The paper seeks to investigate and examine the case for shared leadership at the faculty level of University administration having in mind the role of the Dean and the Faculty officer.

### Concept of Shared Leadership

The term 'shared leadership' is often invoked but much misunderstood by both faculty members and many professional administrators. Against this backdrop then, several attempts have been made by several writers to define the term. Buckmaster (2004), explains that 'shared leadership' refers to that form of leadership where leadership is essentially conceived of as an activity that can be shared or distributed among the members of an organisation or group depending on the needs of the situation and the capabilities of the people involved.

Pearce and Conger (2003), also defines shared leadership as 'a dynamic interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both'(p1). Bradford and Cohen (1998), observe that shared leadership does not eliminate the leader's role or deny hierarchy; leaders have plenty of work and remain accountable for the unit's performance. But they must now encourage and build a shared responsibility system, where the leader can direct reports and collaborate in the management of that unit. Power determined by management level cannot work where knowledge is widely dispersed, where changes in technologies, markets and competition are rapid, and where employees are highly educated. Leadership extends in all directions. It is too narrow a definition of leadership to focus only on managing down. Everyone will have to manage sideways and upwards (pp.15, 184,317). Pearce (2004), suggests that shared leadership is the manifestation of fully developed empowerment in teams, in which team members engage in simultaneous ongoing and mutual influence processes.

In another development, Pearce and Conger (2003), define the differences between shared leadership and traditional leadership in the following way:

The key distinction between shared leadership and traditional models of leadership is that the influence process involves more than just downward influence on subordinates by an appointed or elected leader. Rather,

leadership is broadly distributed among a set of individuals instead of centralised in the hands of a single individual who acts in the role of a superior.

Greenberg-Walt and Robertson (2001), describe shared leadership in the highest levels when the responsibility and the Chief Executive Officers' (CEO) positions need to be integrated.

Holmberg and Soderlind (2004), who have experienced sharing a leading position together, define shared leadership as when two or more persons share the top position, responsibility, working tasks and have equal power. The main presumption for a successful shared leadership, according to Holmberg and Soderlind (2004), is to have a common basic view and prestigeless trust to each other. Furthermore, they state that it is easier to share the working tasks and the responsibility than the power and that the most important thing with a successful shared leadership is that the leader shares the power to make decisions within the organization. Doos & Wilhelmson (2003), also defines shared leadership as when two persons in the same position take the same power in decision making. The business scholars Carson, Tesluk & Marrone (2007), for instance define shared leadership in project teams as follows: "we define shared leadership as an emergent team property that results from the distribution of leadership influence across multiple team members" (Carson et al.:1218).

Models of shared leadership re-envision the **who** and **where** of leadership by focusing on the need to distribute the tasks and responsibilities of leadership up, down, across the hierarchy. They re-envision the **what** of leadership by articulating leadership as a social process that occurs in and through social interaction, and they articulate the **how** of leadership by focusing on the skills and ability required to create conditions in which collective learning can occur (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003.p.24).

Mehra, Smith, Dixon and Robertson (2006) as cited in Hildebrand (2009), for instance, defined shared leadership as a "shared, distributed phenomenon in which there can be several leaders" (p.233). Finally, Ensley et al. (2006), defined it as a "team process where leadership is carried out by the team as a whole, rather than solely by a single designated individual" (p. 1219).

### **Characteristics of Shared Leadership**

There are some key characteristics that every organisation should develop in order to create a fruitful environment for shared leadership. Hildebrand (2009), on reviewing the definition of shared leadership identified five main characteristics that distinguish definitions on shared leadership from each other.

#### **1. Number of individuals involved in shared leadership**

The focus is on the number of people involved in leadership. While some scholars argue that shared leadership exists when two or more people are engaged in the leadership. Others also claim that shared leadership occurs when all members of a team are fully engaged in the leadership process. Thus, it is a shared, distributed phenomenon in which there can be several leaders.

#### **2. Shared leadership as a Group Phenomenon**

It is seen as a group phenomenon, focussing on the group instead of an individual leader that make up the group. Simply put, the focus is on the team as a whole engaging in leadership instead of vertical leadership performed by a single leader. It is the collective that builds up leadership and not on the individual co-leaders who engage in leadership.

#### **3. Shared leadership as a conjoint Agency**

The focus shifts from the individual team member engaged in leadership to the group and influences among team members successively build on each other and thereby affecting team members. Simply put, the leadership process has a reciprocal character, meaning that team members influence their colleagues while they themselves are also influenced. Gronn (2002a), defined this concept as Conjoint agency in distributed leadership. The focus is indeed laid on the reciprocal leadership influence process among team members.

#### **4. Shared leadership as Dynamic Concept**

Although the previous conjoint agency group initiated by Gronn (2000a), has indicated the dynamic successive character of distributed leadership, the focus lies basically on the reciprocal influence process. This definition group of shared leadership is built on this successive character of shared leadership and defined it as a dynamic concept that emerges over time.

In line of this thought, Pearce and Conger (2003), regard shared leadership as "a dynamic and interactive influencing process among individuals in the group for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of the group or organisational goals or both"(p.1). Thus, a team capacity develops over the team's life cycle.

#### **5. Shared leadership as a dynamic concept and a vertical leader**

In this group, scholars argue that shared leadership can emerge even though the team is characterised by a formal project leader. Hence, shared leadership in this context is defined as "a simultaneous, emerging mutual influence process within the team that is characterised by a serial emergence of official as well as unofficial leaders" (Pearce, Yoo, & Alavi, 2004:1219).

### **Administration at the faculty level**

University administration is diverse. Authority is not vested at the centre. It is dispersed in colleges, faculties, departments, units and sections. The administrative activities in a faculty involve the recruitment of members of staff. Any appointment to be made into the faculty begins at the faculty level where the vacancy is declared. The suitability or requisite requirement of the applicant is usually determined by the head. In addition, the faculty coordinates the administrative activities within the faculty in order to ensure compliance to rules and regulations within the University.

Again, for programmes and courses run by departments to be locally and internationally recognised, the faculty liaises with departments to ensure that the programmes and courses are properly accredited.

Lastly, the faculty ensures that proper assessment of students' performance is carried out. By this, the faculty is responsible for efficient arrangement and conduct of examinations.

### **Areas of Shared Leadership**

The dean as well as head of department has the legitimate right to manage other teaching staff as subordinate employees in the interest of organizational efficiency and improved productivity. His or her collaboration with the faculty officer/senior administrator in terms of implementation of institutional policy reduces conflicts that may emanate from their performance of their various roles and duties.

As academic leaders usually occupy professorial position in the university hierarchy, they are responsible for managing budget largely dictated by administrators. The collaboration or shared leadership is needed to effectively manage the dwindling resource allocated to the activity for which resources have been disbursed, (although this discourse provides a viable means of exhibition of authority and power at display).

For the teaching staff, the university is a place they disengage with because they express more commitment to their discipline and less commitment to their organization's management and business direction (Diefenbach & Klaner, 2008 Winter & Sarros, 2002). The collaboration with administrators to provide the normative values, defend and promote distinctive account of the institution, the strategic planning and future positioning of the institution is important. The normative values may include a moral discourse of working with others. To enable institutions of higher education move forward, there is the need to reconcile competing, identity claims and acknowledge that in a hybrid professional structure neither one identity could perform the work in a university setting.

Through regular interaction with each other at convocation meetings, committee or board meetings, teaching and administrative staff establish relationship of mutuality the foundation stores of a 'community of practice' whereby people learn to collaborate, share ideas and find solutions to common problems (Wenger 1998). Electronic notice and discussion boards can also provide ongoing dialogue that may be anonymous and therefore solicit more frank exchanges (Winter 2009).

As universities are characterized by multiple or hybrid identities, heads of department, placed at critical points could help maintain collegial relations and manage stress and conflict effectively at the departmental level. It is envisaged that the understanding of this greater sensitivity to issues of great importance will contribute to the development of the institution.

### **Types of partnership at the Faculty level**

McMaster (2011), describes three types of partnership existing at the faculty level of every university. These include nested, contiguous and segmented partnership.

#### **Nested Partnership**

The Dean in a nested partnership is responsible for aspects of the management of the faculty. The administrator and his team on the other hand support services for the dean in his work. The support role of the administrator in this regard is seen in two phases. The first is the facilitating role in which the focus is to smoothen the way for the dean in the faculty. In this role the administrator prepares reports, manages student-related matters and monitors compliance with university and external rules and requirements. The second role is that of an expert advisor who gathers information or evidence for decision-making and translates university policy for the particular faculty and disciplines.

#### **Contiguous partnership**

In the contiguous partnership, the Dean and the administrator at the faculty work together in a broad range of matters which constitute leadership and management of the faculty. In most cases the dean takes responsibility for setting directions while the administrator manages the implementation of policies. Deans are more likely to view their roles as academic leadership rather than administrative in a contiguous partnership. Administrators on the other hand see their role as parallel but not equal or administrative leadership in support of academic leadership in contiguous partnership. That is why they translate academic dreams into practice. Principally, the

administrator is likely to be the main channel of communication on behalf of faculty with the rest of the university, while the dean emphasises external communications and internal communication with other deans, the Vice-Chancellor in a contiguous partnership.

### **Segmented Partnership**

In the segmented partnership, the dean and administrator work together on some tasks but they separate responsibility for others. The dean chairs the faculty board and heads the faculty. He coordinates the work of the Departments within the faculty and further ensures the timely release or publication of examination results. The administrator, on the other hand, serves as the secretary to the faculty board and assists the dean in his daily activities through constant prompting and timely provision of reports and minutes.

### **Benefits of Shared Leaders**

Kocolowski (2010), posited that in many ways, the research on shared leadership is still in its infancy, but noteworthy benefits have emerged from the few studies that have been undertaken. Perhaps the most commonly cited benefit concerns the synergy and expertise derived from shared leadership model (p.27). Here, the old adage two heads are better than one seems appropriate. Leaders can utilise their individual strengths (Miles & Watkins, 2007), and organisations can benefit from diversity of thought in decision making. Bligh, Pearce & Kohles (2006), as cited in Kocolowski (2010), posited that influence is fluid and reciprocal and "team members take on the leadership tasks for which they are suited or are most motivated to accomplish"(p.306). O'Toole et al (2002), noted that two or more leaders are better than one when the challenges a corporation faces are so complex that they require a set of skills too broad to be possessed by any one individual.

Again, reduced stress levels for key leaders make this model attractive as a more robust shared leadership system does not unduly burden any single leader.

### **Limitations of Shared Leadership**

In spite of the many benefits derived from shared leadership model, one must not overlook the inherent limitations forward in the model. Shared leadership issues border on decision making. Miles and Watkins (2007), observed that sometimes a group of leaders find it difficult to reach a consensus and hence decision can take longer to make. Jackson (2000), supported this assertion and pointed out that team attitudes, turf battles and individual career goals are potential obstacles to efficient decision making. Irreconcilable differences may impede decision making and forward march.

Another limitation stems from issues of apparent conflict between a single - leader structure and team structure. Katzenbach (1998), noted that creating a meaningful purpose, commitment to team performance and team member accountability are challenges involved in shared leadership. Locke (2003), observed, 'No successful, profit- making company that I know of has ever been run by a team' (273). He further mentioned that equal influence among team members is not undesirable, but rarely attainable.

Again, resistance to the model can make implementation extremely difficult. O'Toole et al. (2002), as cited in Kocolowski (2010), believed that such resistance stems 'from thousands of years of cultural conditioning'. They added 'we are dealing with a near universal myth in the popular mind, leadership is always singular' (p.64). However, Lockes (2003), disagrees with this notion and thinks that the resistance rather stems from reality and laws of logic. According to him, core values must be provided from top down.

Furthermore, O'Toole et al. (2002), observed that shared leadership for most people is simply counterintuitive. Leadership is obviously and manifestly an individual trait and activity. They further asserted that the identities of American corporations are often viewed as mere reflections of the personalities of their leaders. The entire organizations are portrayed as shows of the 'Great men' who sit in the chief executive chair.

When members of leadership teams did not fully embrace the principles of fostering differences and encouraging multiple opinions, may risk slipping into group-think (Kezer, 2006:68).

Debates within the shared leadership arena argue that there is the notion of shared leadership at the top of an organisation. According to Handy (1996), although it is fine to have shared leadership at the middle of an organisation, the top leadership must be 'personalised'. This is due to the fact that, task at this level is to provide the glue that holds the organisation together. On the contrary, writers such as O'Toole, Galbraith & Lawler III (2002), are of the view that when the challenges of an institution faces are so complex that they require a set of diverse skills that cannot be possessed by an individual, shared leadership is the only option. The writers continue to argue that the investment community insist on a more traditional and formal hierarchy in organisations, However, there are numerous cases where shared leadership of well-matched and differently-skilled persons have proven to be a very effective strategy. In addition, the success of shared leadership ultimately depends on how the roles originate, how complementary the skills and emotional orientations of the leaders are, how they work together, the leaders role clarity and how they involve others on the management team.

Again, another area of shared leadership domain is which core tasks the leader must retain. Sometimes, the debate is framed as the vertical as against the horizontal leadership models. Locke (2003p.281), advocates an integrated model of top down and shared leadership where the core leadership tasks include vision, values, structuring, selection and training, motivation, fostering and communication. Locke was of the view that shared leadership supplement but does not replace hierarchical leadership. Further, a look at the state of performance review systems in most organizations reveals reward of individual achievement which is an obstacle towards inclination to shared leadership.

Also, Conger and Pearce (2003:299) mention that they do not view shared leadership as the universal solution to any leadership issue or group setting. They argue that there exist situations where shared leadership is not just non-optimal, but even harmful. That is to say that there are situations when members of a team may lack the ability necessary to facilitate shared leadership in alignment of an organisational goal.

Shared leadership is workable in situations when there is enough time, receptivity, knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to the team members, and the organisation. The question is whether all these conditions are ever fulfilled at the same time in organisations.

Locke (2003), enters the concept of shared leadership debate with a great deal of skepticism. According to him, shared leadership was unlikely to work if it is not combined with vertical leadership and questions the existence of true co- chief executive officers in any longer time perspective.

Moreover, some tasks such as vision, core values, choice of members to top management team, structuring and restructuring the organisation should not be shared. On the contrary, selection and training at the lower levels, motivation, team building could be shared. He posits that an ideal leadership model is an integrated model with a combination of shared leadership and the top down model and also contains a bottom -up component which explains management listens to the rest of the organization (Locke, 2003).

Buckmaster (2004), notes that, since there is no language of competence in organizational discourse to describe the activities of relational practice as leadership, leaders who put into practice shared leadership are described as 'nice' thoughtful leaders who care about others feelings. Unfortunately, such leaders are easily rejected as weak, and do not meet the picture of the heroic leader.

Lastly, it has been observed that when organisations want a hierarchical structure, they tend to look for strong single leaders that are renowned and successful to conduct these organisational changes. In addition, the skills required to achieve a high leading position is often far from the skills required to share leadership.

### **Recommendations for enhancing Shared Leadership.**

To make shared leadership more effective and meaningful, the following recommendations are worth mentioning.

#### **The need for trust**

Shared leadership requires some trust. There is the need to build trust among staff so as to allow more flexibility to shift along the leadership spectrum.

- **The need for orientation towards shared leadership**

A shared leadership orientation is more of an invitation for all staff to assume greater responsibility and influence. Staff must be willing to see the big picture and take ownership for the whole organisation if shared leadership does not become a broadly shared orientation, not much change is possible.

- **The need for desire and commitment to change**

There is the need to designate at least one person to encourage staff to make time to reflect, define problems and generate solutions together and articulate a common vision and agreements to enhance the development of shared leadership.

- **The need to observe fundamental management practices**

To make shared leadership more meaningful, there is the need to observe some basic fundamental management practices such as appropriate supervision, effective communication and decision making having a clear strategy and sound financial management systems.

- **The need for investment of time**

Cultivating shared leadership takes significant amount of time. One does not only need time to change the frequency and duration of contact among staff shifting the nature and quality of these interactions but also developing the systems and structures that will sustain these changes. The time spent helps organizations to respond more effectively and efficiently.

- **The need to observe traditional professional demarcations**

Introduction of shared leadership requires extensive preparatory work to overcome traditional professional demarcations (Steinert, Goebel & Rieger , 2006: 251).

- **The need for proper planning, commitment and adaptation to cultural change**

Proper planning, commitment and adaptation to cultural change are required to successfully implement



a shared leadership model (Scott & Cares, 2005:4)

**1. The need for collegial climate and clear communication**

Collegial climate and clear communication are both paramount in all shared leadership and decision making process (Meyers & Johnson, 2008; Rice, 2006).

**2. The need to understand individual roles**

For shared leadership and teamwork to be effective, it is crucial that group members understand their individual roles and do not under estimate the complexity of a shared leadership arrangement (Hall, 2001).

**Conclusion**

University leaders need to be seen, through words and deeds. A key strategy is the crafting of a vision for the institution that is both acceptable and meaningful to both teaching staff and administrators. This involves taking a principled stand in relation to core academic values and at the same time allowing for appropriate contextualization of teaching and administrative activities according to current circumstance, such as allocation of funds for the institutions core business. It will also mean securing the involvement of teaching/administrative and general staff in a broadly defined values-based statement of what the institution and its members stand for and what values will shape the identity of the institution in the future. (Maskell & Robinson, 2002). This is perhaps more likely to occur when leaders acknowledge value differences and talk about higher education in terms of a collective communities rather than a homogenous group united by corporate values and goals. A recurrent leadership challenge will be how to achieve more administrative efficiency when facing a demoralized workforce with a lack of trust in and commitment to, academic as a whole ( Deifenbach & Klerner, 2008, p.32). What is required is a purposeful, conscious and deliberately cooperative approach designed to utilize fully and effectively the respective capabilities and viewpoints of all persons participating in the educational effort. The importance of institutional unity cannot be overemphasized and this is a valid objective of shared leadership.

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